



**Government
of South Australia**

**LAUNCH OF THE
WOMEN'S HEALTH POLICY**

HON LEA STEVENS MP
Minister for Health
Minister Assisting the Premier in Social Inclusion

8 MARCH 2005

Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Centre, 253 Grenfell Street, Adelaide

Thank you Aunty Josie

Thank you for welcoming us onto Kurna land and into Kurna women's space...

I would also like to acknowledge by Parliamentary colleagues

- Hon Steph Key MP
- Jennifer Rankine MP
- Robyn Geraghty MP
- Gay Thompson MP
- Lyn Breuer MP
- Frances Bedford MP
- Vini Ciccarello MP
- Mrs Joan Hall MP
- Hon Kate Reynolds MLC
- Hon Sandra Kanck MLC

Welcome

- Hon Carolyn Pickles
- Mayor Lesley Purdom
- Members of the Women's Health Ministerial Advisory Council
- Chair and Members of all health services and
- Everyone here today interested in Women's Health

This is a healthy space and a healing place...made more so by being invited to be here.

We all know why we are here today...we are here to launch this first women's health policy for the 21st century.

But of course this is not South Australia's first women's health policy as I'm sure many of you know.

Some of you would have received invitations for today asking you to come to the launch of South Australia's first women's health policy.

Well this is wrong.

And as I explained in Parliament yesterday... I think there might have been a little bit of over-enthusiasm on some people's part.

I know... and I'm certain that many of you in this room know that Jennifer Cashmore...the first woman to be Health Minister in South Australia...set us on the path to getting a women's health policy.

She established a working party in June 1982 who's task it was to develop a women's health policy.

The South Australian Health Commission finally released their policy statement in 1984...

Jennifer of course... would be the first to acknowledge that she was not the first politician to promote women's health... of course not.

Whenever women have come together to advance their rights they soon focus on their health rights.

Many have made great contributions to keeping women's health on the agenda. Stephanie Key...Carolyn Pickles...Anne Levy...Diana Laidlaw...Sandra Kanck...and many more women across all party lines have always been there and will always be there for women's health.

The struggle for women's health has always been part of the struggle for women's rights.

Go back over the decades...even the centuries...you will find that whenever women have gathered to advance their rights... our health and the integrity of our bodies is at the forefront of their concerns.

Today...before we go forward we must remember them...remember their struggles and their pain and their achievements...and we must make sure we do not forget.

Fortunately as with many things connected with women's health in South Australia... Jocelyn Auer, the Chair of the Ministerial Women's Health Council... who oversaw the development of this policy, has already worked on making sure we don't forget.

For The Centenary of Women's Suffrage here in South Australia in 1994...Jocelyn wrote a detailed account of the development of women's health. Unfortunately...it was never published...but we are going to fix that... and soon...and we will update it as well.

I wish Jocelyn could have been here today...she has put a lot of work into getting us here...not just into getting this policy right...but working and struggling to advance women's health over many years.

But enough talk about individuals.

All of the individual women I have named would be the first to say that the struggle for women's health is our struggle...it is a collective struggle...it belongs to all of us...and we all must do something...together.

And that is what today is about.

When I see who is here in this room...I can only think of one word...

...AWESOME!

Take your time and take a look around... go on...have a look around.....we are not all here...but many of us are...and we pack a punch...

We carry the struggle for women's health with us...it's in our hands and it's in safe hands...and that's what this policy is all about.

Women's health is always a struggle...just ask all of those who were directly involved in getting this policy ready for today.

I would like to thank every woman who took the time and made the effort to contribute to this policy.

Everybody who put their hand up to help...everybody who had their say...everybody who helped organise consultations and everybody who just wanted to be a part of this...**thankyou**...I hope you thought it was worth it...I certainly do.

Getting the policy here was hard and it was a struggle...and it caused some pain...why?

Because women's health is important...its important enough to struggle over...it's important enough to have conflict over...and in the end... it's important enough to work hard together to get a breakthrough...

And I believe we have...I know we have!

Women's health and the struggle for women's health is... and will remain... **political**...that's big P and little P...

We would not be here... or even close to being here... if it wasn't for the deliberate actions of strong...determined women across all political parties and persuasions.

Not all of them would have called themselves feminist...but I would never question their motives...their passion...or their commitment.

We are here today because of what they did.

We can go further today because of what they achieved.

It's our job now to take the next steps for our sisters...and our daughters...and for some of us (including me) ...our granddaughters and in fact for all of our children.

So... women's health is political...and I think that's good...

Yesterday... for the first time that I can remember... the Opposition asked me two questions specifically about women's health.

And do you know what...I think that's great...I'm happy to be asked questions about women's health...because it matters...and it should be part of political debates.

I think it's great that in spite of political differences...across all women... of all parties... and all political persuasions... we can come together for women's health... and I will do all I can to make sure that our unity keeps going strong.

What I am also pleased about though is that women's health matters so much that I... as Minister for Health... get questions about it...

Governments...past...present...and future...should be held to account for what they do...or don't do...in women's health.

Governments should know that they are being watched...because in years to come...we will all be watching...and acting...as we have always done.

So now its time for me to talk about the policy we are launching today.

Do we here need a women's health policy?

Well...I have to say... NO...

Women have never needed a policy to tell them about their health.

Women have never needed a policy to speak **for them** about their health.

This is not a policy that speaks to women...we don't need it.

Women can speak for themselves.

This is a policy for the health system and how we want it to change.

You wouldn't have had a chance to read the policy yet but... let me highlight some parts of it that I think need to be underscored...

The policy starts by stating...

"This is a policy like no other.

It is about who we are and what we will do.

It is about all of us – the whole health system and the South Australian community.

It is about how changing health for women, changes health for everyone – but it starts with women.

This policy commits all of us to improving the health of women and girls of all ages.

This South Australian Women's Health Policy will bring women's health to the forefront of health reform.

This Policy is here to make a difference in women's lives and the life of our State...

To achieve health reform, women's health issues must inform the way the health system plans, develops, drives and delivers these changes...

To achieve the priorities and targets of South Australia's *Strategic Plan* the health system must ensure strategies are developed which reflect and respond to the health needs and conditions of all women...

But...we are starting with women's health.

Our health system must reflect and respond to our community's diversity.

The place to start is with women in all their diversity.

A reform agenda that is silent on the issues and needs of women is a reform agenda that will not succeed."

I REPEAT... A reform agenda that is silent on the issues and needs of women is a reform agenda that will not succeed.

We all know this...and its way past time that the health system knew it as well.

The purpose of this Policy is to improve the health of all women.

It is universal in its reach, but it starts with those women who have the least access and experience the worst health outcomes.

This particularly means ensuring the policy works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

I stand here with you today... knowing that too much has been said and too little has been done to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their communities to improve their health.

This policy is a commitment for all of us to change that.

This policy reaffirms a commitment to women's sexual health and our reproductive rights.

These rights include the right to access safe termination services. The policy is quite clear about that.

This is a settled issue in South Australia.

The Premier and I have made it clear that there is no need to change that. I'm happy to acknowledge that there is support for this across Party lines.

The other area I want to highlight in the policy is about women's safety.

You cannot talk about women's health without addressing the issue of violence against women and the issue of women's safety

The policy states that...

Women experience violence, including sexual violence, in their families and in our community.

Women face violence in ways that entraps them, damages them and can kill them.

We must have zero tolerance to violence.

No level of violence is acceptable.

There are no reasons – no excuses.

Health Services **must** ...let me say that again... Health Services **must**...develop strategies which:

- promote women's safety in the home and in the community;
- help women to safely disclose their experience of violence;

- provide immediate responses when needed;
- link women to the range of community supports they need; and
- above all else, make sure that Health Services persist until women are safe.

We must persist until women are safe... I hope this is clear to everyone...and strengthens the arm of all those workers in our health system who do persist every day.

When you read the policy you will see it is about system change...what goes for health services and regions goes just as equally for the Department itself.

So I suppose by now you might all be wondering why Jim Birch is not here.

Well I had the same question myself when he had to tell me he couldn't be here.

On this one occasion...I decided to let him go...you see he's in Canberra today working on improving the lot of prisoner health...and when you consider that nationally...for women prisoners...

- 81% have post traumatic stress disorder
- 75% have been physically or sexually abused
- 66% are Hepatitis C positive
- 42% are Hepatitis B positive
- 39% have attempted suicide
- 38% have drug related problems...and
- they have 10 times the rate of abnormal pap smears than the rest of the community

...How could I say no...Jim had to be there...but he is working for us.

The final thing I want to highlight in the policy is that it's all about **LEADERSHIP**.

Throughout the policy are many references to the need for developing women's capacity and opportunities for leadership.

Well I think today is a good day to make a start.

Today I can announce that the Department for Health has funded 10 places for women to attend the fifth National Women's Health Conference in Melbourne in April.

But I can also announce that the Southern Adelaide Health Service...the Central Northern Adelaide Health Service and the Children Youth and Women's Health Service have each agreed to match it.

That means that at least 40 women from across South Australia will be going to one of the most significant Women's Health Events in Australia for the next five years.

But it does not stop there.

The Women's Health Policy states that *"Health Services will make spaces for women and promote their capacity to engage in and lead health reform strategies"*

These forty women will form the nucleus of a women's health caucus, which I will personally convene to help drive the reform agenda and the women's health policy across all regions and all health services.

Just think what we can do when we get even more organised!

So now it's time to get this policy moving.

Today we are handing the policy over to the next phase.

The Children Youth and Women's Health Service together with the Department of Health now have the responsibility to drive this policy into action and use it to get concrete results.

But it's not their policy it belongs to all of us.

We all must take a lead in making this policy work and every health service must take responsibility for making it mean something for women.

The policy is here to make the health system accountable for women's health.

The policy will require regular public reporting on progress.

There will annual report cards published so that we can all see how far we have come and how far we have to go.

Population approaches to health planning...funding...and service development will be required to reflect the clear intent of the women's health policy and explicitly incorporate the needs and health issues of women.

Annual Health Service Agreements will require services to specifically implement this policy.

I will also be advancing changes to Health Service constitutions and if necessary legislation to help drive women's health to the core of our health system.

Many of you would know that in creating the three new Health Services as part of our reforms last year I made sure that there were fifty percent of women appointed as Board members and fifty percent of leadership positions were held by women.

I am also working hard with country regional chairs to increase the participation of women on Boards in regional and rural health services.

This Women's Health Policy is here to strengthen their arms on those Boards and in their organisations.

So in conclusion...let me again quote from the policy...

"The *South Australian Women's Health Policy* is here and it is now...

...it is a tool for us to use today and a tool to help us build a healthier future for South Australian women."

So let's get moving!